Conceptualising peripheral urban literature in France and Brazil

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Abstract
This paper is founded on the premise that, while banlieues and favelas do not share the same history, architecture and demography, their residents experience similar forms of stigmatisation and these prompt comparable responses from writers. The comparison between French 'banlieue narratives' and Brazilian 'marginal-peripheral literature' offers an important insight into how literature produced inside vulnerable communities looks at itself and is perceived from the gatekeepers of literary institutions, and what strategies are available to writers who wish to destigmatise disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The article starts with a comparison of urban development in France and Brazil, before it discusses both countries' respective literary traditions and ways of conceiving urban and literary margins. Finally a range of key strategies equally relevant to both contexts are discussed. The conclusion sheds light on what is universal about the experience and literary representation of urban disadvantage.

Key words
Marginal literature, urban periphery, favela, banlieue, destigmatisation

Introduction

State-constructed French banlieues and the spontaneously growing favelas do not share the same history, architecture and demography. However, their residents might experience similar forms of territorial stigmatisation including shame, low self-esteem and racial and socio-economic discrimination. How do writers voice the exclusion of peripheral populations from mainstream society in two different national contexts? Do *favelados* and banlieues residents perceive their respective marginality in the same way, despite their diverging access to healthcare, education, employment and state interventions within their territory? How do writers living in peripheral communities react to ethnic, racial or religious discrimination? What strategies do they use to tackle clichés and deal with identities assigned to them? And how are they seen by the gatekeepers of literary and cultural institutions in their countries? Based on the premise that a comparison between two literary margins is useful for understanding how the position of marginality is constructed and used by writers in response to stigmatisation, this article will attempt to shed light on what is universal about urban disadvantage and what particular challenges are involved in producing peripheral urban literature in France and Brazil.

In a context in which leading French politicians, journalists and scholars increasingly resort to borrowing foreign terms loaded with negative connotations to describe French suburban housing estates, words need to be used responsibly. The term 'ghetto', which sparked controversy when it appeared in French political discourses in the 1980s (Vieillard-Baron 2011, Robine 2004), became widely accepted in official discourses by the 2010s. So much so that following the Charlie Hebdo attack, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls resorted to borrowing the word 'apartheid' to denounce the depth of France's territorial, social and ethnic divide. This article has no intention to outbid politicians in fear-mongering, nor does it suggest that French banlieues may be turning into drug lord strongholds requiring military police pacification any time soon. It simply proposes

looking at two forms of literary marginality which, if not the sole examples of this phenomenon, are certainly among the most prominent ones today.

This exploration will start with a comparison of the French and Brazilian urban developments, showing their similarities beyond their differences. The second part will outline how different literary traditions and political conceptualisations of the urban margins led to different perceptions of peripheral literature in France and Brazil. The third section will look at key writing strategies elaborated by authors who have been adopting different subgenres, aesthetics and approaches to language. Finally, the conclusion shed light on what is universal about peripheral literatures and what factors are accountable for national differences.

Can we compare banlieues to favelas?

According to Angélil and Siress (2012) the construction of French banlieues arose from centralised urban planning, guided by political and economic influences emanating from the centre. The displacement and relegation of poor communities to the urban margins began with the major modernisation Paris underwent in the 1870s. Geographer David Harvey (2003) sees the works undertaken by Baron Haussmann as an efficient way of evicting the 'dangerous classes', insalubrious housing and polluting industries from the city core, which is reserved for the elites while power is asserted through the polarisation of centre and periphery. This organised spatial hierarchy was further reinforced through the construction of government-subsidised housing on a large scale taking Le Corbusier's Radiant City (1963) as a blueprint for social change. Between 1945 and 1975, thousands of housing units were constructed in the periphery of most French cities prioritising quantity over quality in order to quickly resorb the population of substandard housing and slums. If initially there was a fair degree of social diversity among banlieue residents, the divide between the centre and the periphery increased considerably after the sanitisation of the slums in the mid-1970s, when immigrants, especially those from Northern Africa, were let into the public housing estates (Tissot 2007).

The first critiques of large-scale banlieue construction started emerging as early as in the 1960s. They highlighted the failures of a monotonous architecture as well as the absence of many essential facilities. When, in the 1970s, a new approach to housing made low-interest loans available, many middle-class families purchased their own homes (Merlin 2012: 71-80). This led to a progressive impoverishment and homogenisation of banlieue populations while the decline of heavy industries triggered increasing unemployment rates and dissolved working-class solidarity on the so-called 'red belt'. The late 1970s witnessed the first wave of urban violence, which prompted the state to set up urban policies. Although these were initially conceived for the 'social development of the neighbourhoods' (Dikeç 2007: 15), they rapidly gave way to the more authoritarian goal of re-conquering no-go areas.

The banlieues' current stigmatisation is due to a number of factors including top-down urban policies tackling social inequalities on a territorial basis, the increasingly biased treatment of banlieue-related subjects in mainstream media, a stronger focus on security issues in political discourses, the progressive ethnicisation of class divides, the abandonment of the French social model in favour of more neoliberal approaches and, since 9/11 and the 2015-16 terrorist attacks and the rise of Islamophobia. Recent studies by Desponds and Bergel (2015), Tissot (2007) and Dikeç (2007) have shown how urban policies moved from the ideal of social development

advocated in the 1983 Dubedout report, to the current objective of 'breaking up the ghettos' by using physical renovation, economic development and restructuring, as suggested by the Borloo Law (2003). Sedel (2009) and Berthaut (2013) have also highlighted the media's responsibility for the moral condemnation of banlieue youth and the abandonment of militant journalism in favour of sensationalism which facilitated the banlieues' disqualification from social question into simple 'faits divers'. The regular succession of urban uprisings since the 1980s, treated in mainstream discourses as 'riots' rather than political protests, has contributed to the resurgence of old colonial stereotypes and the consolidation of a negative imagery depicting banlieue residents as undisciplined, violent, uncivilised and responsible for their own exclusion.

Kokoreff, Mouhanna, Rigouste, and Mohammed (all in Waddington et al. 2009) demonstrated that the primary motivation for rioting is a deep-seated feeling of rejection and injustice, which constitutes a common experience, especially among the children of postcolonial immigrants involved in strained relations with everyday institutions such as the school, welfare and housing agencies, employers and, above all, police (Kokoreff 2009: 149) and justice officials. Mouhanna (2009) affirms that the maintenance of public order and the tight control of protesters are major priorities for the French police. Police forces in France use space saturation techniques and intimidation rather than mediation, negotiation or prevention. Police officers are seen in the banlieues with more contempt than any other authoritative institution and police conduct is undoubtedly the main catalyst for unrests that are usually triggered by the killing or wounding of a youth or adolescent during police interventions. Police officers do not try to forge lasting links with the population. They regard themselves as outsiders, are often fearful of the residents and show contempt for ethnic minority youths who, in their view, do not qualify for full rights of citizenship (Waddington et al. 179).

Unlike banlieues, favelas or *morros* (hills) started as informal settlements without pavement and services. They siphoned off electricity from the lines running around the street. They were distinguished from the formal city or *asfalto*, which had 'titled, taxable properties […] connected to municipal water and sewage systems and […] formal connections to gas, electricity and cable services' (Gaffney 2016: 1135). The first favelas were established in the 19th century. Their growth was fuelled by the abolition of slavery in 1888, followed by industrialisation and rural exodus after the 1940s. Some favelas such as Rocinha, Santa Marta, Vidigal or Cantagalo expanded on Rio de Janeiro's hardly accessible hillsides, but some more recent favelas are conjuntos (estates) built by the state to rehouse displaced favela residents. In the 1960s, 70s and 80s, the mass migration of uneducated workers from rural areas and the impoverished North-Eastern regions resulted in anarchical constructions in the favelas as well as in social problems including mass unemployment, drug trafficking and violence.

The state has adopted various policies towards favelas over time. During the military dictatorship in the 1960s-70s, Rio's authorities displaced 175.000 people (Freeman and Burgos 2017: 55) to the periphery, where large-scale state-financed construction programmes were initiated. As aggressive eradication campaigns failed to address the root causes of the housing shortage and blamed *favelados* for their living conditions, they contributed to worsening the housing crisis and stigmatising urban poor struggling to obtain decent housing. Residents waged resistance to forced removals from the 1950s to the 1980s by organising grassroots movements and gradually replacing

their wooden shacks by concrete houses. A number of communities were successful in acquiring recognition as rightful residents.

The first urbanisation programmes oriented to favelas started in the 1980s and they targeted the provision of public services and infrastructure. According to Lacerda (2015), their success remained limited due to 'the lack of political articulation, a fragmentation of interventions and the non-existence of a security programme at state level to cope with the emerging criminal gangs' (2015:78). With the end of the military dictatorship Brazil turned into an important hub for drug trafficking. In the 1980s-90s, drug-related violence and police repression skyrocketed, leading to upsurge in homicide rates in slums controlled by gangs. In November 2008, the government of Rio de Janeiro launched the Pacifying Police Units program (*Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora or* UPP) to reclaim the city from the gangs. From the start, the UPP received considerable financial and media support. It announced the ambition to integrate 'pacified' favelas into the formal city 'through greater provision of public goods and services that would be made possible by the creation of a parallel social programme for police interventions, the UPP social' (Corrêa 2016: 102). Although successful in reducing the level of violence, the pacification programme has also attracted significant criticism, due to some instances of violence and corruption on the part of the occupying police forces but also a lack of clear guidelines (Borges et al. 2012; Corrêa 2016: 103), which led to a different set of policing strategies in favelas depending on the individual profile of UPP unit commanders.

Although the post-dictatorship legal order prohibits forced removals, several commentators revealed how two recent mega-events, the 2014 Football World Cup and the 2016 Olympics were used as pretexts for displacement through thinning in the context of neo-liberal urban development using methods ranging from threats and promises to disinformation and insecurity. According to the Rio Municipal Government, '22059 favela families, or approximately 77,206 individuals, were removed between the time mayor Eduardo Paes took office in January 2009 and July 2015, and tens of thousands more were threatened with removal' (Freeman and Burgos 2017: 550).
Can we compare banlieues to favelas? Contrasting their horizontal marginality with the favelas' vertical one would be overly simplifying, as not all banlieues are on the periphery and not all favelas are vertical or centrally located. As demonstrated by Desponds and Bergel (2015) and Perlman (2010), both banlieues and favelas are strongly heterogeneous with a multiplicity of forms. Just like banlieues have been shaped over the decades by different waves of urban renovation, favelas have also evolved from the original '« jerry-built shacks » of wood or wattle and daub to brick-and-mortar dwellings several stories high' (2010, 29), blurring binary oppositions such as centre-periphery, inside-outside, formal-informal, legal-illegal, asfalto (pavement)-morro (hill) or rectilinear-curvilinear. The 2015 report of the ONPV (National Observatory of Urban Policies) distinguished 1436 priority neighbourhoods in France with a total population of 5.3 million, representing 8.4% of the French population while, according to the 2010 Census, around 11.25 million Brazilians live in favelas, about 6% of the population (Bonnet-Galzy, 2016).

Words chosen to name segregated urban forms also matter, since designative selections not only modelise the world but also prompt the creation of previously unseen social referents (Dahlet 2016). When in the 1990s the originally neutral 'banlieue' had become saturated with negative connotations, planners and politicians replaced it with the more general or polysemic 'quartier'

(quarter, neighbourhood), which often appears in stabilised syntagms such as 'quartiers sensibles'. (Turpin 2012: 107) Perlman (2010: 29) highlights a similar evolution in Brazil where the word 'favela' has been replaced by '*morro'* (hill) or '*comunidade*' (community). Until the 2000s '*comunidade*' was only episodically used to designate favelas. Its systematic use over the last ten years in institutional and media discourses reflects the favelas' reconceptualisation, which seeks simultaneously to celebrate the hospitality, solidarity and self-regulation of these neighbourhoods while also asserting the need of pacifying them through police interventions. (Dahlet 2016: 3) As for the terms used for the residents both '*favelado'* and '*banlieusard*' are considered as pejorative and insulting. This devalorisation also extends to stabilised syntagms like 'jeune de banlieue' (banlieue youth), a designation the press has turned into a stereotype associated with delinquency, violence and drugs (Longhi: 2012).

In mainstream media and political discourses, both favelas and banlieues are depicted as detached from the rest of society. They are represented as problems to be tackled by the government via the provision of security and public order while the unequal distribution of wealth that causes their conditions is ignored, enabling public utterances blaming the poor for their own situation (Lacerda: 2015). The ideological and discursive construction of marginality developed by state administration in both countries is founded on moral judgments, which depict banlieues and favelas as homogeneous loci of criminal activities, places of disease, overcrowding, insecurity, and poverty. It is also important to note, that both countries have other forms of urban and rural marginality[1], and yet, favelas and banlieues occupy a particular place in the urban imagination in which they remain the main, if not the only, territories associated with crime, tensions with the police, and low-income minority ethnic populations with low social status.

How are literary margins conceptualised in France and Brazil?

Marginal literatures in France and Brazil have been influenced by different literary precursors and these are partly accountable for the different ways in which these movements have been constructed by the critique. Banlieue literature could be considered as a successor of Beur literature, a literary movement named after North-African immigrant parents' French-born children whose literary coming of age coincided with the 1983 March for Equality and Against Racism (Amellal: 2014). Although the emergence of Beur literature in the 1980s overlapped with banlieue residents' fight for equal treatment and the protest against police violence, many Beur novels are not specifically rooted in banlieues. The first critics to theorise Beur literary productions, Laronde (1993) and Hargreaves (1991, 1992, 1997), saw the movement's main characteristics in the authors' bi-cultural upbringing, divided sense of self and experimentation with voicing the complex tensions between their desire to integrate into French society and the obstacles in the way of their social mobility.

Beur authors were mostly young men in their late twenties and early thirties, born or raised in France. Their shared demographic features included modest social standing and material deprivation, resulting from 'the low occupational status and limited incomes of most North African immigrants [which] put them at the bottom of the social latter'. (Hargreaves 1989: 662) Novelists like Azouz Begag, Farida Belghoul, Ahmed Kalouaz, Akli Tadjer, Mehdi Charef, Nacer Kettane or Leïla Houari addressed the identity crisis of young Beur protagonists and their attempts to achieve social mobility through the French educational system. At micro level, their texts were characterised by realism, humour, sarcasm, a colloquial tone, spontaneity, verbal dexterity, and

irreverence in their approach to the French language. At macro level, they often opted for first person narration and a fairly simple semi-autobiographical form which, as we will see, continue to characterise banlieue narratives several decades later.

Both Hargreaves and Laronde made the authors' socio-economic marginality and their roots in the immigrant community the cornerstones of their analysis of the Beur movement. They neglected the role of the urban periphery as the novels' symbolic locus of enunciation, either since many Beur novels were not set in banlieues or because the construction of the suburbs' progressive stigmatisation in media and political discourses was only about to start in the 1980s. This process accelerated in the 1990s with the advancement of the banlieue's ethnicisation and its mediatisation as a space associated with postcolonial populations (Hargreaves 2014, Horvath 2016).

According to a series of recent studies (Reeck 2013, Horvath 2014, 2015, Vitali 2014), the transition between Beur and banlieue literatures probably occurred around the new millennium. It was triggered by the emergence of a new, territorially (rather than ethnically) defined identity claimed by a generation of French men and women having their roots in working-class suburbs and their origins in postcolonial immigration. Authors started celebrating interethnic camaraderie and solidarity instead of representing singular ethnic communities and announced the rise of a relatively coherent popular culture composed of rap music and hip-hop culture, ethnic stand-up comedy and banlieue film, entrenched in the ethno-culturally diverse but socio-economically homogeneous working-class suburbs. The banlieue generation's identity was consolidated by two factors highlighted by Hargreaves (2014): the suburban estates' increasing stigmatisation and the ethnicisation of their social milieu.

Ironically, banlieue literature seems to mirror the French state's territorial approach to socio-ethnic inequalities and poverty. Instead of expressing the claims of a single ethnic community, its main ambition is to give voice to what Beaud and Mauger call a 'sacrificed generation': working-class parents' children living in relegated urban areas who are victims of 'a profound and lasting crisis of the school system, labour market and the offer of symbolic goods' (2017: 8) which destabilises working class lifestyles.

Paradoxically, French Republicanism known for its colour-blindness and reticence to acknowledge particular forms of discrimination experienced by ethnic minorities prompted a strong social divide along class rather than ethnic lines, opposing affluent city centres and impoverished, unemployment-ridden banlieues ', in particular after the 2000s when the progressive abandonment of the welfare state in favour of neoliberal policies resulted in a drastic increase of social inequalities. This divide has led to the development of new, hybrid, often explicitly postcolonial identities in the urban periphery, which deliberately challenge Franco-French homogeneity and colonial nostalgia.

France's literary margin gained further visibility in 2007 with the publication of a manifesto by writers' collective *Qui fait la France?*[2] in a collective book of short stories entitled *Chroniques d'une société annoncée.* The ten authors contributing to the volume, Karim Amellal, Jean Eric Boulin, Khalid El Bahji, Faïza Guène, Dembo Goumane, Habiba Mahany, Samir Ouazène, Mabrouck Rachedi, Mohamed Razane and Thomte Ryam, stated their common ambition to reintroduce social criticism to the contemporary literary agenda. They accused mainstream literary

productions of obstinately turning toward middle-class individualism and identifying 19th-century realist novelists engaging with major social issues as their literary models. As the leader of the group, Mohamed Razane, declared in an interview, working class people on the margin are often despised by dominant authors just as much as by politicians: 'Beigbeder, Zeller and their likes are selling us nothing but air, they incarnate this dominant, very Parisian literature that tells stories about people who have no problems, sons and daughters of well-to-do families who feel bored'.[3] The fact that the manifesto did not have the resonance its signatories hoped for, illustrates the contempt that French literary establishment shows for the urban margins. While the more prominent 'littérature-monde' manifesto, equally published in 2017 but signed by a more high-profile group of authors including Nobel prize winner Le Clézio, triggered considerable debate, the collective volume was either ignored or dismissed by the mainstream media on the ground its heavy themes and lacking literary qualities.

The manifesto constitutes a rare moment of solidarity and alliance between writers pursuing similar objectives and aesthetical principles. It was a rather short-lived attempt to constitute a literary movement under a distinguishable label. The term banlieue literature, however, has never been explicitly claimed by the authors who, like Razane or Djaïdani, aspire to universalism (Reeck 2011: 124, 146). They see it as a restrictive label which likely to keep them at distance from the literary establishment. The signatories of the manifesto, like most writers from the urban periphery (Mouss Benia, Rachid Djaïdani, Skander Kali, Wilfried N'Sondé, Rachid Santaki, Insa Sané, Abd al Malik, Kaoutar Harchi, Didier Mandin, or Houda Rouane, etc.) belong to the grey area in French literature that Vitali (2011) calls '*littérature intrangère'* and Rebourcet (in her article published in this volume) labels 'Francophone literature from within'. Casanova (2004) describes the particular position of Francophone authors as tragic, since the Paris-based French literary institutions are simultaneously the instances of their literary legitimation and of their political domination (1999: 186). This is also true for postcolonial French writers from the banlieues whose belonging to the French literary field is doubly contested by their ascendance and association with the urban margins.

In the Brazilian literature, the term 'marginal' emerges in the 1970s with the movement 'Poesia Marginal', whose main contributors were João Antônio, Ana Cristina César, Cacaso, Paulo Leminski, Francisco Alvim and Chacal. Eble and Ramos (2015: 194) note that, while these mostly Rio de Janeiro-based poets were marginal in terms of their relations with the literary establishment, most of them actually belonged to the middle class or even upper-middle class. The movement emerged in the context of the dictatorship and distinguished itself by a number of formal and aesthetic characteristics, such as the use of colloquial language, short texts, visual elements including photographs and drawings, ironic tone, swearwords and themes rooted in everyday life and middle-class social practices including sex and drugs. It was known for being spontaneous and refusing rigorous esthetical models.

Favela writing from within only started in 1960 with *Quarto de Despejo*, a narrative by Carolina Maria de Jesus. The self-educated Afro-Brazilian writer, who lived in a Sao Paulo favela with her three children, published part of her diaries with the support of the journalist Audálio Dantas. Becoming an international bestseller overnight allowed her to leave the favela for a better neighbourhood, although she was forced to move back later. Critical of 'the burden of the legacy of racism, gender prejudice and political neglect of the marginalized' (Levine, 1994: 56), she

deliberately chose to defy stereotypes attached to poor Afro-Brazilians and favela residents. Although she did not belong to the intellectual elite, her work is considered by Ferreira (2002: 103-104) as a literary as well as anthropological account. The narrator's use of vernacular, her belonging to several intersecting categories of marginality (as a black female *favelada*) and effort to depict the harshness of everyday life in a marginal urban environment, solidly anchor *Quarto de Despejo* in Brazil's emerging marginal literature.

According to Tonani (2013), today's marginal literature is inaugurated by Paulo Lins' *Cidade de Deus* published in 1997. The novel's innovation consists in its overlapping locus of enunciation and main theme. Lins is the first author who uses his own experience as a former favela resident to produce a narrative that unites fiction and testimony. For Resende, he situates himself 'in the same physical, architectonic and symbolic space of exclusion about which he speaks'. (2002: 158) In the late 1990s, Lins is followed by a generation of authors emerging from the urban periphery such as Ferréz, Allan Santos da Rosa, Sérgio Vaz, Sacolinha, Marcelino Freire, Alessandro Buzo or Rodrigo Ciríaco. Mostly based in São Paulo, these writers form a group on the basis of their shared lower-class origins and desire of using literature as a means of denunciation and cultural resistance. They write about the periphery from within and focus on both social issues and hip-hop culture. Their writing is nourished by slang, colloquial language and structures borrowed from rap songs and converted into literary models (Eble and Ramos: 2015).

In his introduction to the literary supplement *Literatura Marginal: A Cultura da periferia* (2001), Ferréz highlights the movement's intention to preserve a popular memory and culture threatened by hegemonic discourses. He believes that only authors who draw their legitimacy from their immediate contact with the periphery are entitled to write about it. Unlike in France, periphery writing in Brazil appears to be a collective movement rather than an individual pursuit[4], This is demonstrated by the greater number of collective publications, including three special issues of the magazine *Caros Amigos* published in March 2001, 2002 and 2004 and two volumes, *Je suis favela* and *Je suis toujours favela*, published in French translation in 2011 and 2014 by Anacaona. These volumes position the authors in a both literary and political space. The movement seeks to represent groups excluded from the Brazilian society (Bastos and Seidel, 2011, Peçanha 2009, Tonani 2013). It denounces violence, highlights positive aspects of the periphery and produces texts to which readers from the urban periphery can relate in terms of themes, language and identity.

In a reflection on the advantages offered by marginality, Tonani explains that as an auto-designation, marginality allows writers to base their collective identity on social rather than aesthetic criteria. This positioning is explicitly political, as the margin is generally defined antagonistically in opposition to a centre. Occupying the periphery can be seen as performing an act of resistance. Marginality, however, can also be understood in other ways, for example as keeping away from the publishing industry and its norms, using a subaltern language which is at odds with the institutional power, or belonging to the sectors excluded from the system and its benefits. The term's polysemy is highlighted by Ferréz himself, who refers to members of the 1970s 'poesia marginal' as the movement's literary precursors. In a text entitled 'Literary Terrorism' he affirms:

> 'When I published Capão Pecado they asked from what movement I was, if I was from modernism or avant-garde… and I was from none, except for hip-hop. At that time, I discovered reportages about João Antônio and Plínio Marcos and knew the term marginal. I found it adequate to what I was doing.' (Nascimento 2006: 15)

While deliberately conflating the movement's social and political marginality with the aesthetic revolt of a group of recognised writers from the 1970s', Ferréz attempts to confer to today's marginal literature some of the prestige of these precursors, without necessarily subscribing to their aesthetic traditions.

We can conclude that, although *littérature de banlieue* and *literatura marginal* share a series of thematic and aesthetic similarities and both represent excluded groups, their stances towards marginality are different. While in Brazil marginality is claimed by authors as the foundation of their collective identity and political and artistic positioning, in France marginality continues to be seen as a stigma imposed in order to exclude authors from the literary establishment and its national canons. This can be explained by the longstanding cultural centralisation of French nation state and the subsequent devaluation of the margins, may these be French provinces, former colonies or banlieues. Margins in France, always perceived as less valuable than the centre for their lack of refinement, wit and good manners, are obviously not associated with any prestigious literary model that could appeal to contemporary authors.

How is urban stigmatisation voiced in France and Brazil?

Peripheral literatures in France and Brazil share a series of themes (youth, violence, revolt, crime, inequality) and generic codes (life writing) and aesthetic particularities (realism). Four of these will be considered in this final section: the influence of the performing arts, the generic model of life writing, the tension between everyday aspects and extraordinary events, and peripheral authors' ambivalent feelings towards crime fiction.

Proximity with spoken word

Peripheral literatures seem to maintain privileged links with the spoken word in both countries. They coexist in the urban space with popular genres of performing arts such as the slam poetry, the ethnic stand-up comedy or rap music and are influenced by these in complex ways. Laurent Béru's (2011) work on ethnic stand-up comedy highlights how its appropriation by a new generation of minority ethnic comedians in French banlieues has popularised this North-American genre in France. Ethnic stand-up comedies and banlieue narratives both use slang and neologisms and imitate oral speech. They ridicule taboos including colonial history and racial segregation by playfully overstating clichés. For example *Allah superstar* (2003) by Y.B. borrows elements from the stand-up to parody mainstream discourses about immigrants, banlieue youths and Islamic radicalisation in peripheral neighbourhoods. The novel ends with a terrorist attack perpetrated by the narrator, an aspiring comedian, while performing on the stage of the Parisian Olympia theatre. Many novels have young male first-person narrators who alternate humorous anecdotes relating to everyday life in peripheral working-class neighbourhoods with impassioned diatribes against social exclusion, police violence, institutional racism or the lack of social mobility (Amellal 2006, Benia 2003, 2007, Boulin 2014, Djaïdani 1999, Kali 2008, Mandin 2006, Razane 2006, etc.). Some of these enraged tirades use extreme levels of verbal violence like Amellal's and Razane's

philippics in which the ferocious language coexist with physical violence, swearwords and a frantic rhythm imitating uppercuts or rappers' diction.

Both French and Brazilian narratives make explicit claims to rap music and hip-hop culture. In her recent book Bettina Ghio (2016) sheds light on the mechanisms of the important cross-fertilisation between rap lyrics and banlieue literature, showing that writers and rap artists use similar rhetoric strategies to depict the suburbs. Writers refer to rap music to convey an atmosphere, make their characters credible or prove their own authenticity. References can be integrated into the plot like in the rapper Abd al Malik's autobiographic novel (2004) or incorporated in the text in the form of rhymes, rhythms or alliterations. Rachid Santaki, co-founder of the website hiphop.fr and the 5Styles Magazine, is just one of the many authors quoting rap songs, inserting references to hip-hop artists in dialogues and mixing rap-like verses into his prose. References to popular music are sometimes also present in the form of a musical soundtrack like in the texts of Insa Sané (2006, 2008) or Kaoutar Harchi (2009).

In Brazil hip-hop has become popular as a contra-hegemonic movement promoting the use of culture as a tool to enact social change in historically marginalised communities (Eble, 2012). Performers like the group AfroReggae or rapper MV Bill, portray the *traficante* lifestyle and use 'culture as a weapon' to end the communities' paralysis caused by the domination of drug lords and brutal police (Maddox 2014). Poets and novelists of the marginal peripheral movement are often involved in hip-hop activism. For example the poet Sérgio Vaz founded *Cooperifa*, a *sarau* (poetry reading community) based in São Paulo in which 'the marginalised can sublimate their feelings every week at a local bar' (Maddox 468) by performing their texts and publishing them in anthologies. Another writer, Roberto Ciríaco, who teaches literature, encourage students to read literary extracts of their choice using techniques developed in the saraus such as a rythm and semi-dramatisation close to rap or hip-hop (Soares 2008: 80).

Da Cruz notes that both marginal literature and rap contribute target audiences dominated by mainstream discourses by contributing to the discursive offer available to them (2015: 532-563). Tonani (2013, 104-147) suggests that both forms of expression use texts as vehicles of social intervention and political discourse and seek to enable the public to undertake their own critical reflexion on social reality. This posture is particularly present in the texts of authors like Gato Preto, Sérgio Vaz and Ferréz who use rhythmic structures and political content to raise the readers' awareness. Hip-hop composer and writer, Ferréz, adopts the rappers' characteristic look. Like a rapper, he poses on the cover his novel *Capão Pecado* (2000) dressed in and street wear with an aggressive expression on his face half-covered by his hood. The novel is illustrated with photographs from the eponymous neighbourhood and contains quotes from various rap groups. As one of the movement's principal spokespersons, Ferréz has been particularly influential in establishing a dialogue between marginal literature and hip-hop. He launched 1 da Sul, a community movement involved in organising cultural and social activities and commercialising branded objects (clothes, mugs, key rings) aimed at peripheral populations.

Life writing

Banlieue and favela narratives have a particular interest in telling life stories from the periphery. Authors often write like autobiographies, fictive biographies, testimonies or Bildungsromane to

show the coming of age of teenage protagonists. These genres allow novelists to focus on young characters in their late teens and early twenties, a crucial age in which they set out to achieve the social position they desire (Beaud and Mauger 2017) and realise the existence of obstacles in the way of their social mobility. Concentrating on young characters' trajectories, authors can also tackle many of the stereotypes media and political discourses have constructed about peripheral youths. Some novels by Sané (2006, 2012) and Pandazopoulos (2009) not only deal with young characters but are specifically aimed at young readers and published in youth literature collections. Guène (2004, 2006), Mahany (2008, 2010) and Rouane (2006) have a particular interest in female protagonists' challenging trajectory to adulthood. They focus on the characters' experience with education, job search, first love and settling down. By creating strong, talented and independent female protagonists of immigrant descent, these authors seek to refute popular stereotypes about Muslim women often diabolised in the media for wearing the Islamic headscarf. For example in Mahany's *La petite Malika* (2010) the heroin successfully graduates from elite university ENA, secures a high-flying job in politics and finds a Spanish upper-class fiancé. She, however chooses to give up this glamorous life and return to her former banlieue to teach French at the local high-school.

The autobiography and the auto-fiction are also popular genres in Brazil. For example in *A Número Um* (2015) de Oliveira narrates her own transformation from Rocinha's drug lady into a writer. Theatre director and Youth Network founder Faustini mixes impressions, anecdotes and black and white photographs from his own youth in his *Guia Afetivo da Periferia* (2009) to provide insight into a peripheral teenager's discovery of Rio de Janeiro.

A number of novels, such as Benchetrit's *Le Cœur en dehors* (2009) or Rachedi's *Le Petit Malik* (2008) focus on even younger characters. Traditionally understood as the age of innocence and learning, childhood is also frequently represented in favela narratives for example in the collective volume *Eu sou favela* (2015, 2016) as well as novels by Ferréz (2000), Lins (1997) or Ludemir (2004). These texts show children growing up in marginal urban contexts, exposed to violence and poverty. According to Nunes da Mata (2009), their lost childhood and altered sociability are used as indicators of profound socio-economic and class inequalities.

Ordinary vs. extraordinary

Both in France and Brazil many narratives depict everyday life in the periphery. Texts that focus on longer periods in their characters' lives are more likely to represent routine events, rituals and ordinary life. Writers tend to use this strategy to demonstrate that poverty, limited access to education, employment and housing or administrative difficulties can be greater challenges for marginalised populations in the periphery than other problems more frequently highlighted in media reports like delinquency, crime and drugs. Authors also use his strategy to denounce inequalities and replace clichés with more complex ideas. For example, characters in Guène's novels (2004, 2006) are often shown queuing for used clothes at the Salvation Army or for a French passport at the Préfecture de Police. Just like in Carolina Maria de Jesus' *Quarto de Despejo* (1960), which focuses on the day-to-day struggle of a *favelada* mother to feed her three children, keep the family shack habitable and earn a modest income by collecting discarded cardboard, this text denounces the economic hardship that affects many families on the margin.
At the opposite end of the spectrum, we find texts in which the protagonists' lives go out of hand and a succession of unexpected events inevitably lead to a tragic ending. Novels, in which young

protagonists closely miss their goal or die prematurely, provoke feelings of loss, defeat and anger. This feeling is particularly acute in *Viscéral* (2007), not just because the hero is the absolute role model (he is a hard-working educator, boxing champion, coach, and entrepreneur) but also because he is accidentally shot dead just after he has found love and landed the lead role in a movie. It is surprising to observe how many novels end with suicide or homicide, not only in Brazil where drug-related violence is endemic as we can see in Oliveira's (2015), Lins' (1997) or Ferréz' (2000) texts, but also in France. Many banlieue novels end either with the protagonist's violent death (Benia 2007, Sané 2008, Ryam 2006), or with their involvement in a homicide (Korman 2013, Kali 2008, N'Sondé 2012, Amellal 2006, Y.B. 2003, Razane 2006).

Most novels mix everyday routine and violence, in various proportions. For example in *Le Poids d'une âme* (2006) the unemployed Tarik spends his day shopping for groceries and renewing his brother's passport but on the way home he saves the life of a driver by pulling him out of the burning bus. However such sharp contrasts between ordinary and extraordinary events are more frequent in France than in Brazil where even everyday life is strongly marked by violence. This is particularly striking in the short stories published in the collective volume *Eu sou favela* (2015) many of which end with the violent death of very young protagonists or in Ferréz' *Capão Pecado* (2000), in which the narrator Rael kills the lover of his former wife and dies later in prison.

The temptation of crime fiction

Although both in banlieues and favelas novels often show crime, they do not restrict their representation of urban margins to violence and criminality. This may be the reason why most authors from the periphery tend to avoid crime fiction as a genre. Looking at two novels set in favelas characters by bestselling Brazilian author Patrícia Melo (2000, 2006), Losada Soler (2014) shows that these are at the same time favela novels, crime fiction and *Bildungsromane*. The novels look at individual violence rooted in Brazil's history and current socio-political situation and use characters tempted by easy money and obsessed with consumer society. Melo describes favelas without using the stereotypical metaphors of illness and epidemics: her resolutely modern slums are equipped with imported products, beauty parlours and television sets constantly reminding *favelados* of consumption goods and other status symbols they cannot afford. Although Melo describes favelas from the outside and does not belong to the marginal literature movement, Losada Soler likens her novels to favela literature on the ground of their social criticism and focus on describing the structural violence of a politico-social system based on extreme inequalities. In such a system, violence does not originate in individual attraction to crime but 'permeates the community and its system of relationships as a whole and contaminates in reality the entire social system' (26).

It is rare to find novels that are banlieue narratives and real crime novels at the same time. Insa Sané's *Du plomb dans le crâne* (2008), a youth crime novel recommended from the age of 14, focuses on the rivalry between two twin brothers, the depressive Sonny and Prince, a reckless and exuberant pimp and a drug trafficker. At the end of the novel, however, Sonny and Prince turn out to be the same character suffering from schizophrenia. Using the mental illness to justify the character's involvement in crime is a way to illustrate that these activities are pathological and remain exceptional in the banlieue. Rachid Santaki's *Flic ou caillera* (2013) exploits stigmatisation in Saint-Denis by using city as the setting in which criminal networks and corrupt police officers terrorise ordinary inhabitants. Unlike many writers from the periphery, Santaki has no manifest

desire to destigmatise the French suburbs[5]. Nevertheless he manages to subvert certain stereotypes by describing Saint-Denis as a complex city, in which pockets of poverty and drug addiction coexist with thriving start-ups, world-class sport facilities and company headquarters. He also reveals brutal and dubious police practices and corruption, which go unpunished, thereby demonstrating that crime is far from being a prerogative of banlieue youths.

Conclusion: The efficiency of de-stigmatising strategies

This comparison reveals that both in France and Brazil urban marginality is strongly stigmatised in mainstream discourses which make peripheral populations responsible for their own marginality. It is therefore natural that most authors who write from a geographically and institutionally marginal position attempt to defy dominant stereotypes. Typical strategies to achieve this goal include realist representations of ordinary life, a sociological focus on the difficulties encountered by those living in the periphery and dramatic accounts of extraordinary events ending in tragedy. While the former rhetorical techniques appeal to the readers' reason, the latter tend to target their emotions.

Peripheral authors' narrative aims are reflected in their choices of the literary genres and subgenres that are the best suited to support a realist aesthetics and give voice to peripheral populations. These include various types of life writing but also some counter-cultural forms inspired by hip-hop culture. Other genres, which might jeopardise the authors' destigmatising program, are handled with more caution. It is probably fair to state the French periphery's dominant genre is the novel while shorter narrative forms and poetry are more popular in Brazil. These differences may be due to different literary traditions and influences. However, the unprecedented popularity of slam poetry and rap in both contexts show the universal appeal of hip-hop culture in marginal urban settings.

Marginality as a literary positioning affects the content of literary works as well as their form and aesthetics. Inspiration from oral speech, performing arts, urban sociolects, coarse language, neologisms, and non-canonical forms of popular culture offer many opportunities to writers to innovate, disrupt existing canons and produce highly original ways of writing. Their success demonstrates the vitality of the periphery as a laboratory for experimentation.

The differences between both peripheral literatures also reveal the influence of different pressures in the literary fields in which French and Brazilian writers produce their texts. Writers' main influences include prestigious precursors, literary institutions (publishers, book fairs, critiques, and awards) involved in their legitimation, and their principal competitors in a given literary market. The Brazilian peripheral writers' greater pride in their marginality and frequent participation in collective movements contrast sharply with the French authors' more solitary position and reticence to being labelled. These particularities reveal differences in the ways in which urban and literary margins are perceived and conceptualised in both countries. However, these differences are also indicative of the presence of other actors (for example resident associations, social activist, NGOs promoting minority ethnic empowerment or reparation claims) in the peripheral urban space who may share with the writers the task of making unheard voices audible.

Banlieue narratives and favela literature share a multiple marginality. Firstly, they both arise from a context of territorial (and often also economic, social and ethnic) segregation in the city and

represent peripheral urban communities from within. Secondly, they both reflect postcolonial marginalities. Finally, they also belong to the margins of their respective national literary fields, which, in the words of Pascale Casanova, are composed of 'relations of force and a violence peculiar to them – in short, a literary domination'. (Casanova, 2004, xii) While literary audiences' genuine interest in feared or exoticised urban margins is believed to facilitate peripheral authors' access to the publishing industry, critiques' general inclination to underestimate such writers' literary talent in favour of their sociological interest makes it at the same time more difficult for them to fully emancipate themselves from the marginal niche market and achieve full literary legitimacy. This aspect tends to be further reinforced by some authors' tendency to affiliate themselves with popular culture rather than prestigious literary precursors. Despite these obstacles in their way to achieve legitimacy, peripheral writers continue to play a vital role in renewing literary canons and reaching out to large peripheral audiences who have difficulty to connect with other, more dominant cultural forms.

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[1] This is particularly true for France's rural population examined by Christophe Guilly in *Fractures françaises* (2010) as well as banlieue-like inner city neighbourhoods analysed by Paul Kirkness in Carpenter, J. & Horvath, C. (2015) Regards sur la banlieue (Bruxelles: Peter Lang).

[2] The name 'Qui fait la France' is a play on the words 'qui fait' and 'kiffer' which can be translated as 'Who makes/loves France?'

[3] http://www.afrik.com/article12786.html#gpE1skVL7uHTvb5O.99 consulted on 10/10/2107.

[4] In France, numerous writing workshops led by authors or educators in various banlieue settings that have resulted in a range of witness narratives published in recent years. This phenomenon, which could be compared to the Brazilian *saraus*, have been discussed in Carpenter, Juliet and Christina Horvath (2015), *Regards sur la banlieue* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang) 183-198.

[5] I obtained this information when I interviewed Rachid Santaki in July 2013 and in September 2017.